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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/26/2015
TAGS: [PREL](#) [SCUL](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [YI](#)
SUBJECT: 'TIS THE SEASON ... SERB CCK OBSTRUCTION FORCES
CANCELLATION OF USOP HOLIDAY CONCERT

Classified By: COM Tina Kaidanow for reasons 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) Summary: A newly appointed hard-line Serb CCK leader in Gjilane/Gnjilane reportedly exerted strong pressure on the parents of Serb children who were allowing their children to sing in a USOP holiday concert. The Serb children from the Gjilane area are members of Kosovo's only mixed-ethnicity youth choir. USOP has organized a holiday concert in Pristina for several years with this choir, but as a result of this non-participation has been forced to cancel the event. COM and DPO attempted to intervene with Gjilane/Gnjilane Serb officials, and DAS DiCarlo even raised the matter during her meetings with Serb leaders, but it appears that further pressure from our end would only impact on parents who were reportedly threatened with the loss of civil service jobs. CCK pressure on local Serbs, particularly in Kosovo's south, looks to be part of a sustained pressure campaign to discourage Serb participation in Kosovo institutions and break remaining ties with Albanian communities. End summary.

12. (U) USOP's Public Diplomacy section has been the steward of one of Pristina's only holiday traditions, an annual concert in the main performing arts center. The centerpiece of the concert has for four years been "Birds Are Singing", a talented multi-ethnic youth choir from the Gjilane/Gnjilane area that sings in both Serbian and Albanian. In addition to the annual concert, PD has worked with the group providing sheet music and other support. USOP has traditionally brought the children to Pristina for a rehearsal and the performance itself, outfitted them for the event, given them gifts, fed them a holiday meal, and taken them back to Gjilane.

13. (C) PAO received word that the newly arrived CCK Representative for the Gjilane region, Radovan Denic, was opposing the participation of Serb children. DPO travelled to Gjilane on November 29 to meet with Deputy Mayor Borislav Peric and to press for Serb attendance. Peric, a former IV grantee, said that he was sympathetic, but intimated that the parents of the children had been told they would lose their civil service jobs if their children took part. Peric nevertheless claimed that he supported the initiative and

would pursue the issue.

¶4. (C) COM and visiting DAS DiCarlo discussed the issue with Peric on the margins of a US-EU meeting with Serb municipal leaders in Novo Brdo on December 5. Peric again promised to do what he could, but subsequently told USOP that it would not be possible for the children to perform, once more citing pressure on their parents. The Serb choir director later called USOP to say that he, too, would be unable to participate in any activities this year.

¶5. (C) Comment: We have an active portfolio of USAID and PD programs in Serb areas. Others of PD's Serb participants and partners have reported increasing pressure to cut ties as well. Most have not yet folded, but there are signs that that may change, particularly regarding our multi-ethnic ACCESS English classes and other programming in the American Corners in Mitrovica and Gracanica. Most notably, PAO was told by the Director of the Gracanica Music School that music students whom PD had invited and transported to a concert in Pristina two weeks previously suddenly "were not interested" in attending USOP's Jazz Ambassador's program this past weekend. USOP is one of the few institutions in Kosovo that can bring Serbs and Albanians together; it is a vital tool of our diplomacy and a critical lifeline between two estranged communities. To pursue this further on our end would only add to the pressure on the parents of the singers, but we find this a worrying sign of future CCK/Belgrade policy with regard to ties between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo, especially in the south, where relations have generally been tolerant if not warm between the two communities. End Comment.

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¶6. (U) Post clears this message in its entirety for release to Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari.
KAIDANOW